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ABSTRACT

The strategies of active surveying and active skimming are previewing techniques that may enable high school students to discover independently the macrostructure of expository materials. Research has indicated that advanced knowledge of overall discourse structure improves reading comprehension by serving as a framework for organizing new, incoming information. The two reading strategies help supply such advanced knowledge, while developing and reinforcing skills necessary for proficient reading. When students use these strategies, they learn to approach texts with purposes and expectations, to ask questions using their background knowledge as a resource, to hypothesize answers to their questions, to confirm or refute their answers when reading, and to further interact with the text by generating additional questions as they read. High school teachers should incorporate the active surveying and active skimming strategies into their content area lessons so that their students will be able to cope effectively with the reading demands of college courses. (An outline of a group activity in surveying a chapter, and an exercise in active skimming are included.) (RL)

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Teaching Previewing Techniques to High School Students

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An Abstract of

Teaching Previewing Techniques to High School Students

Current research related to text macrostructure indicates that advanced knowledge of overall discourse structure aids comprehension by serving as a framework into which the reader can fit new, incoming information. Two previewing techniques which may help high school students to grasp independently the macrostructure of expository text are described along with several instructional activities. The strategies of Active Surveying and Active Skimming are designed to develop and reinforce skills necessary for proficient reading and, with sufficient practice, can enable students to communicate independently with text. It is suggested that high school teachers incorporate these strategies into their content area lessons so that students will be able to cope effectively with the reading demands of high school and college.

TEACHING PREVIEWING TECHNIQUES TO HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Many college-bound students graduate from high school with limited understanding of text structure and organization. As a result, they often have difficulty comprehending textual material and are placed at a severe disadvantage in their college courses. An examination of several high school textbooks reveals that authors do have a concern about this problem and compensate for it with numerous textbook aides, such as advance organizers and preview questions. Some texts even go so far as to tell the reader what the main idea of the chapter is prior to reading it! While such aides may provide the reader with insight into the macrostructure or gist of the material, they allow little opportunity for readers to discover it on their own. In that the ultimate goal of all teaching is to enable students to become independent learners, it is crucial that they are taught strategies which will facilitate their gaining knowledge of text macrostructure by themselves.

There is some research which suggests that previewing text may be an effective strategy for gaining insight into the general scheme of the text. For example, Anderson (1978) reports that the skilled readers he observed previewed the text in some manner in order to get an overall picture of its organization. The tendency of most students, however, is to jump right into a chapter, often with minimal expectations regarding its content, and to emerge with limited comprehension of important concepts. Unfortunately, instruction in previewing strategies is often reserved for the more skilled readers, while the less skilled readers are forced to rely on text and teacher prompts for an understanding of the text. In this paper, surveying and skimming, two previewing techniques which are primarily associated with increasing reading rate and flexibility, will be suggested as strategies which may help both good and poor high school readers to grasp independently

the macrostructure of expository text.

Macrostructure may be viewed as a higher-order unit of organization which summarizes the main points of the text (Waters, 1980). There is some evidence that prior knowledge of main ideas increases recall of important information (Rickards, 1975). Adapting the concept of advance organizers espoused by Ausabel (1960), Rickards interspersed main idea sentences in the text, that is, one main idea sentence was presented before every two paragraphs in the text. Results indicated that these superordinate prestatements yielded greater recall of superordinate concepts than any other condition in the experiment. While such research supports the idea that knowledge of text macrostructure facilitates recall, it entails rewriting the text. The process of discovering the main ideas is, again, not left to the reader.

Knowledge of text macrostructure prior to reading the text can aid comprehension in two ways. First, it can serve as a framework into which the reader can fit new, incoming information. Upon reading the entire selection, this framework enables the student to read selectively, searching for and processing the important ideas, rather than haphazardly selecting and storing information that may or may not be relevant to the central idea. Second, knowledge of text macrostructure provides a basis from which the reader can generate hypotheses about the content of the text. According to current psycholinguistic theories of reading, a proficient reader approaches text with expectations and based on these expectations, generates hypotheses about the content of the selection. These hypotheses are then confirmed or disconfirmed as the reader progresses through the text (Goodman, 1973). Unfortunately, many students come to text with limited or even nonexistent expectations as to the content. As a result, they are unable to generate hypotheses, a skill critical to efficient and active reading. By capitalizing on the

inherent organization and structure of expository-type textbooks, previewing not only enables readers to discover independently the macrostructure of the text, but also provides them with a store of background knowledge from which they can begin to predict and confirm the major points of the selection. In the remainder of this paper, it will be demonstrated how surveying and skimming, with some expansion, can serve to reinforce those reading skills necessary for proficient reading: building expectations, generating hypotheses based on these expectations, and confirming these hypotheses through interaction with the text.

Surveying

Surveying is a technique which allows readers to quickly get an overview of a textbook chapter. Readers speed through material at rates up to fifty times faster than ordinary reading, thus enabling them to cover a greater amount of material than is ordinarily possible. Surveying usually involves six steps: (1) Analysis of the chapter title; (2) Analysis of subtitles; (3) Analysis of visuals, i.e., graphs, tables, cartoons; (4) Examination of italicized words; (5) Reading the introductory paragraph; (6) Reading the concluding paragraph (Brown, 1975). These components of a chapter usually contain information relevant to the central idea of the selection; thus the surveying technique provides the reader with a good overview using a minimal investment of time.

Active Surveying

The technique of surveying has been modified so that it not only provides a foundation for generating questions, but also reinforces additional strategies employed by proficient readers. In Active Surveying, the reader is taught to approach the task with the expectation of discovering the structure

and organization of the selection. As the student surveys the chapter components listed above, questions are raised as to the content and central idea of the selection. This is similar to the second step of the SQ3R procedure, (Robinson, 1961). With SQ3R, however, after generating questions based on the headings and subheadings, the student reads the text to find the answers. During Active Surveying, the reader not only generates questions, but also predicts the answers, based on background knowledge as well as on information gained from the survey. For example, when examining the title, the reader asks "What do I already know about this topic?" (background knowledge), and "What do I think this chapter will be about?" (expectation and prediction). Following the Active Survey, the text is read section by section, and predictions of answers to questions raised about headings and subheadings are confirmed or disconfirmed. Confirmation of predictions is not only an extremely rewarding experience, but also teaches the student to interact with the text by bringing background knowledge to the reading act. If the predictions are incorrect, that is, if they do not match the information in the text, the reader engages in a rethinking process and then either disconfirms the predictions or raises further questions about them. The student is taught further to inquire about information found in the text that was not addressed originally, but which may be related to the central theme of the chapter.

A critical aspect of teaching Active Surveying is that the teacher does not fall into the same trap that many textbook authors do. The goal of instruction is not to present students with survey-type questions, but instead to teach students the process of asking these questions themselves. One very useful and interesting activity for accomplishing this goal has been developed by James Nichols (1978). Groups of students survey a chapter and create a quiz which will be used by other members of the class during subsequent lessons.

INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

If students have difficulty generating questions, the ReQuest procedure may be used (Manzo, 1968). In this technique, the teacher reads sections of a selection with the students; they then take turns asking and answering each other's questions about the selection. The unit of questioning may be individual sentences or paragraphs. The teacher models good questioning behavior and provides feedback to students about their questions.

In summary, Active Surveying is one strategy that facilitates independent acquisition of text structure and organization. Such knowledge leads to selection and processing of more relevant information, skills that are primary to proficient and productive reading.

Skimming

Skimming is another technique normally associated with rapid reading and flexibility. According to Brown (1975), the main ideas of 60 to 90 percent of expository paragraphs are contained in the first sentences of these paragraphs, with the last sentence being the next most likely place to find them. When using the skimming strategy, the first and last paragraphs are read in their entirety, and the first and possibly the last sentences, of the intervening paragraphs are read. The eye is trained to sweep quickly over the rest of the paragraph picking up possible key words. Thus, skimming exposes the reader to many of the main ideas that comprise the macrostructure of the selection.

Active Skimming

In a study conducted with college students, Jacobowitz (1980) found that students who skimmed a selection and read it once performed as well on tasks of reading comprehension as students who read the entire selection twice, suggesting that skimming is an effective and efficient previewing strategy. It was further suggested that students in the former group might have exhibited even better comprehension than students in the latter group if they had taken a more active role in the process. The reader can be taught to search actively for the main points rather than just to read passively the first and last sentences of the paragraphs. Further, students are encouraged to generate hypotheses about what is contained in the selection that they may then confirm or disconfirm when reading the entire selection.

As with Active Surveying, instruction in Active Skimming is designed to teach students to determine text macrostructure on their own. As they skim, students attempt to remember key words that they then use to paraphrase main ideas after skimming. In addition, they use these key words to develop an outline of the chapter that they can then modify when rereading it. This outline serves as a scaffold or framework into which additional information may be integrated. After skimming the chapter, students are asked also to predict other important ideas contained therein that they can then confirm or disconfirm upon rereading.

INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE

The ultimate goal of instruction in Active Skimming is to enable the student to perform most of these activities mentally, without the aid of pencil and paper. Thus, Active Skimming can be another independent previewing technique

which allows students to acquire insight into text macrostructure in an efficient manner.

Conclusion

In this paper it has been suggested that advanced knowledge of overall discourse structure aids comprehension by serving as a framework into which the reader can fit new, incoming information. The strategies of Active Surveying and Active Skimming have been described as previewing techniques which may enable readers to discover independently the macrostructure of expository material. In addition, these techniques develop and reinforce skills necessary for proficient reading. Students are taught to approach text with purposes and expectations, to ask questions using their background knowledge as a resource, to hypothesize answers to their questions, to confirm or disconfirm their answers when reading, and to further interact with the text by generating additional questions as they read. With sufficient practice, Active Surveying and Active Skimming can enable a student to communicate independently with text. It is suggested that high school teachers incorporate these strategies into their content area lessons so that their students will be able to cope effectively with the reading demands of college courses.

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Figure 1

Surveying a Chapter

Group your students. Have them organize into a leader, writer and runner. The "runner" seeks help from the teacher or other groups when the group runs into problems. Later, copies are made for all in the group.

Objective: The group will survey the chapter and create a quiz which will be used by other members of the class during the following lessons. Tell students that their questions will appear on examinations.

The Group at Work: Teacher distributes paper or ditto master and moves thru room.

I.	Look at the Chapter Title---------- The Major Headings and Sub-Headings.	Create five fill-in questions.
II.	Look at the photographs, portraits, cartoons, etc. in the Chapter. ----------	Create a six item matching quiz with two distractors.
III.	Vocabulary: Look for underlined or italized words. Note any critical technical terms which seem important. ----------	Write five words asking for their definition.
IV.	Look at the maps and charts----------	Create a four question multiple choice quiz with four choices for each question.
V.	Identify five critical people in the chapter ----------	For each, write a short essay question asking who was the person? When and where did they live? Why were they important?
VI.	Identify three events or important ideas ----------	Write an essay question for each. Get help if you can't compose a question.

Figure 2

Exercise in Active Skimming

Title of Selection_____

1. Using information from the title and your skimming, what was the topic of the article?

_____

2. What does the author have to say about the topic? Write your answer in one complete sentence. This should be the central idea of the selection.

_____

_____

3. List ten key words that you remember from skimming and that you think are highly related to the central idea.

1.	6.
2.	7.
3.	8.
4.	9.
5.	10.

4. Write one sentence for each word that you feel paraphrases a main idea.

5. What other important ideas do you think will be in the article? Using your key words as a guide, write five ideas.

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6. Using your key words as a guide, outline the chapter as best you can.

7. Reread the chapter and answer the comprehension questions. Check your answers with the instructor and record your score.